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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

19 AUG 1971

Honorable Nancy Hanks, Chairman
National Endowment for the Arts
National Foundation on Arts & Humanities
Washington, D.C. 20501

Dear Miss Hanks:

This letter is in response to the President's memorandum of May 26, 1971 wherein he requests that we advise you of what the arts have contributed to this Agency, how we can assist the arts and artists, and what ideas and suggestions we may have for the future.

For the past ten years the Central Intelligence Agency has actively sought to develop a partnership with the arts. This partnership began when Mr. Allen Dulles, then Director of Central Intelligence, submitted the design for the present headquarters building in Langley, Virginia, to the National Fine Arts Commission for comment. Since the building was outside the District of Columbia, the Fine Arts Commission was not required to approve. It did, nonetheless, endorse the design with enthusiasm.

Primary artistic concern has centered around our environment. An Agency Fine Arts Commission was established in 1961 on the occasion of moving into our new building at Langley. Its first concern was the monotony of the interior of the building where the walls, partitions and doors had been painted gray and most of the flooring was also gray. The depressing effect upon the employees demanded some action to enliven the physical environment. The Agency engaged a professional interior design firm (Interior Space Design of Chicago and New York) to submit a coherent and imaginative color design for the building. The design recommended jointly by the consultant firm and the Fine Arts Commission was accepted by management. This design was immediately implemented and has remained as the basic building color plan ever since.

Through the years the Fine Arts Commission has explored possibilities of providing wall hangings for public and executive office space. Color and black and white photographs, produced by a senior official of the Agency, were acquired at no cost except framing. An arrangement was worked out with the National Collection of Fine Arts for the loan of a limited number of prints, in return for which the Agency had them framed. In addition, the National Collection of Fine Arts loaned the Agency several large paintings from its Johnson Collection, which are hung in public spaces. The Corcoran Gallery of Art loaned the Agency Currier and Ives prints which are hung in the Director's suite. Finally, through the generosity of Vincent Melzac, a selection of paintings from his collection have been loaned to the Agency on a semi-permanent basis.

The Melzac loan exemplifies the successful cooperation between the Agency and the arts. When Mr. Melzac agreed to lend several paintings to the Agency, the Chairman of the Fine Arts Commission, realizing that the Commission was not knowledgeable in contemporary art and its installation, turned to the Corcoran for help. James Harithas, Director of the Gallery, was invited to Headquarters to examine installation possibilities. He agreed to select six paintings from the Melzac collection and offered the help of his curator, Jim Pilgrim, in hanging the paintings. At about the same time Tom Downing, one of the better known artists represented in the Melzac collection, was invited to Headquarters to offer his suggestions on installation. Mr. Pilgrim accompanied the initial selection of Melzac paintings and supervised their installation. He has subsequently made two more visits to Headquarters to advise on the installation of paintings.

In the process of exploring and dealing with the problems of public spaces, the Fine Arts Commission realized that it also had a responsibility to the inhabitants of the building and their own private spaces. Based on the thesis that it is difficult if not impossible to achieve the improvement of environment by management edict, the Commission sought to exercise its influence through the education and involvement of individual members of the Agency. About eight years ago the management approved a Commission recommendation to use a major hallway tangent to the main quadrangle as an exhibit hall. At the ceiling on either side a metal rail was installed within which fasteners on plastic rollers serve as a suspension point for hanging pictures along the wall. In

the middle of this hall six exhibit cases have been stationed. There have been exhibits there ranging from loans from the Corcoran Gallery, the National Collection of Fine Arts, the National Gallery, posters, photographs made by employees, the annual painting exhibit of Agency employees, and educational traveling exhibits of the American Federation of Art to an exhibit of antique pewter collected by one of the Agency's employees. Comments on these exhibitions have shown that while employees are not uniformly enthusiastic about every exhibit, they strongly support the activity of exhibitions, which they find exciting and educational. The Fine Arts Commission has also sponsored a series of four lectures on American art given by Mr. Donald R. McClelland of the National Collection of Fine Arts. In addition, the Agency was fortunate to obtain the film "Civilisation" which was shown in thirteen installments to a large number of employees, and which proved to be so popular that a special Saturday showing was arranged for employee spouses.

Efforts to involve employees have been achieved through several channels. Approximately 170 posters by contemporary artists were received as a gift from Posters Original in New York through the National Collection of Fine Art. These have been mounted on foam core, two exhibits have been held, and employees have been afforded the opportunity to select on a first-come first-serve basis what they would like in their offices after the show. Sixty posters were obtained for \$1.50 each from the London Transport, posters which the London Transport had commissioned reputable artists to create. These have also been mounted on foam core and distributed to offices. Using in-house facilities, somewhere between 500 and 600 black and white photographs have been made available to offices during the last three years. Currently, we are finding Sierra Club color lithographic posters, trimmed and framed, very attractive and popular.


As employees request assistance it has been the practice of the Fine Arts Commission to use the occasion to involve them in seeking to improve their quarters through standard practices in cleaning up, putting away, eliminating superfluous and non-functional furnishings, and by improved arrangements of furniture.

Another area being explored is the use of pottery, produced in the Appalachian area by native craftsmen, such as ash trays and containers for dried grasses. Accents such as these have greatly enhanced the working environment.

It is clear how art has helped this agency to solve many environmental problems through exhibitions and consultations as well as its presence in our areas. Our hope is that stimulating and educational exhibitions will continue to be available to us and that we will continue and expand the relationships which have developed these past years. We hope that in the not too distant future the National Collection will relax its loan policy to permit short term loans for one or two years of paintings to hang in executive offices.

It is not as clear how this or any other government agency can help artists. Certainly the educational programs which we have undertaken will make individuals more aware of art; however, this only indirectly helps the artist. The purchase of pottery is directly beneficial to these artists. The purchase of paintings is, however, not practical because the price is high, people move, and tastes change. On the other hand, rental is not out of the question. Rental of art works, as long as proper care is taken of them, would benefit both the Agency and the artist. By renting art government will steer clear of the dealer-museum-collection triangle that defines tastes and sets prices in the art market while at the same time benefitting from art's presence.

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JOHN W. COFFEY
Deputy Director
for Support

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